



Klamath Network Featured Creature

March 2008

Sundew (*Drosera* spp.)

General Description:

Two species of sundew are native to our region: the round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and the great sundew (*D. anglica*). Both are insectivorous plants typically found in infertile and acidic wetlands, such as bogs and fens.

Sundews are rosette-forming herbaceous perennials with narrow, hairy leaf petioles that end in spoon-shaped leaves covered with 4-10 mm (0.2-0.4 in) long spines, or laminae. The upper surfaces of the laminae are densely covered with red glandular hairs that secrete a sticky mucilage, or “dew,” which inspires the common name. In *D. rotundifolia*, the leaves are rounded into “lollipop” profiles, whereas in *D. anglica* the leaves are longer and narrowly spoon-shaped.

A typical round-leaved sundew plant has a diameter of about 3-5 cm (1.2-2 in), with a 5-25 cm (2-9.8 in) tall inflorescence rising from the center of the leaf rosette. English sundews are typically larger, up to 20 cm (~8 in) across. Both species have white or pink five-petalled flowers, which produce slender and tapered light brown or black seeds up to 1.5 mm (0.02 in) long. Sundew species frequently form sterile hybrids, with these two local species forming a hybrid (*D. x obovata*).

Where to see it in the Network:

Both sundew species can be seen at Little Willow Lake in Lassen Volcanic NP and Sphagnum Bog in Crater Lake NP. Round-leaved sundew has also been reported near Redwood National Park at Big Lagoon.



Round-leaved sundew with remains of a butterfly.



English sundew putting the squeeze on an unfortunate fly.



Sundew (*Drosera* spp.) from Crater Lake NP. The two samples with elongated leaves (on left) are English sundew (*D. anglica*) and the rosette (on right) is round-leaved sundew (*D. rotundifolia*). The larger middle sample is believed to be a hybrid (*D. x obovata*).

Distribution:

Both round-leaved and English sundews are circumboreal species, occurring from the wet mires of the British Isles across northern Europe and much of Siberia to Japan, and large parts of northern North America. Round-leaved sundew, the more common species, grows at lower elevations and latitudes as far south as Florida and New Guinea.

Feeding:

The slow but lethal ways of sundews have long captured the macabre imagination of school children (at least they did mine!). Both our species, like all other sundews, use mucilaginous glands, called tentacles, that cover their laminae to attract, trap, and digest small arthropods, usually insects. The hapless insects are attracted by the sweet scent of the “dew” for their last meal. Upon landing on the plant, they become mired in the sticky drops of mucilage as the tentacles and laminae slowly engulf them. When something gets caught, the tentacles touching the prey exude extra mucilage to mire down and asphyxiate the prey. Although most sundew prey consists of small insects such as flies, bulkier insects such as small butterflies, damselflies, and even dragonflies can meet an untimely demise in the loveless, oozing embrace of this plant predator.

More Information:

Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drosera_anglica and
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drosera_rotundifolia

Jepson Flora Online:

<http://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/>

Carnivorous Plant Society FAQ:

<http://www.sarracenia.com/faq.html>